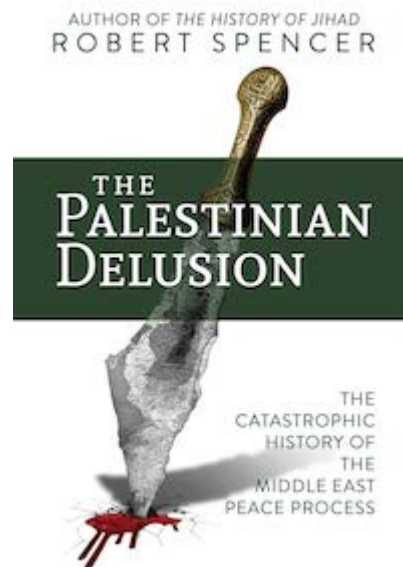


Pope Francis: ‘Mary Unites Muslims and Christians’

jihadwatch.org/2024/05/pope-francis-mary-unites-muslims-and-christians

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May 24, 2024



Pope Francis is highlighting the Blessed Virgin Mary as a unifying figure between Muslims and Christians, despite the significant departures between Islamic trashing of the Mother of God and dogmatic Catholic teaching.

During his visit to Verona prison — a detention facility with a significantly high number of Muslim prisoners — the pontiff insisted that “the figure of Mary is a figure common to both Christianity and Islam, she is a common figure, she unites us all.”



Pope Presents Islamic Theology of God

Francis spent Saturday in the city made famous by the playwright William Shakespeare in his romantic tragedy Romeo and Juliet, where he visited the Montorio Prison and addressed the prisoners, urging detainees to “talk to God about our pain and help each other carry it.”

In a bid to relate to the Islamic notion of a compassionate Allah (which translates simply to “God”), Francis described God as possessing “three principal virtues: closeness, compassion and tenderness.”

“God is close to all of us, God is compassionate, and God is tender. And I thought about tenderness — we don’t talk much about tenderness — and I thought of this gift: the Madonna with Child, which is indeed a gesture of tenderness,” he added.

In her welcome speech, prison director Francesca Gioieni informed the 87-year old pontiff that the inmates came from 40 different countries and a variety of religious backgrounds.

“God is one,” the pope told the prisoners. “Our cultures have taught us to call him by different names, and to find him in different ways, but He is the same Father of us all.”

“He is one,” Francis continued, “and all religions, all cultures, look to the one God in different ways. He never abandons us. With Him by our side, we can overcome despair and live every moment as the right time to begin again.”

Academics Accuse Pontiff of Promoting Religious Indifferentism

The pontiff’s controversial remarks come days after a coalition of academics and writers accused him of promoting the heresy that “God not only permits, but positively wills the pluralism and diversity of religions, both Christian and non-Christian.”

Within days after those comments – the Vatican unofficially backpedaled somewhat, saying the pope’s words should be taken to understand that it is God’s permissive will, not active, that is responsible.

But 20 years earlier, the Vatican was a bit more direct.

According to the declaration *Dominus Iesus* (On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church), “the Church’s constant missionary proclamation is endangered today by relativistic theories which seek to justify religious pluralism, not only de facto, but also de iure (or in principle)”.

“It is clear that it would be contrary to the faith to consider the Church as one way of salvation alongside those constituted by the other religions,” the declaration, issued by Cdl. Joseph Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI) as prefect of the Congregation of the Doctrine for the Faith in 2000, stated.

Further, Ratzinger warned against identifying “the One and Triune God” revealed in the Holy Scriptures with “belief in other religions, which is religious experience still in search of the absolute truth and still lacking assent to God who reveals himself.”

Scholar on Islam Warns About Syncretism with ‘Muslim Mary’

In comments to *Souls and Liberty*, Islamic historian Raymond Ibrahim said that Francis’ series of remarks was “yet another attempt to try to convince Catholics that Islam is somehow similar to their faith when, in fact, Islam appropriates the names and sacred auras of biblical figures, but then recasts them with completely different attributes.”

Ibrahim, a prolific writer and author of recent bestseller *Sword and Scimitar: Fourteen Centuries of War Between Islam and the West*, explained: “Far from being the Eternal Virgin as she is for 1.5 billion Christians — Catholics and Orthodox — Islam presents

Mary the Mother of Christ as ‘married’ to and ‘copulating’ with Muhammad in paradise.”

In an article for FrontPage Magazine titled “Muhammad and the Virgin Mary: A Match Made in Heaven?” Ibrahim cited a hadith (Islamic canonical tradition) where Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, declares: “Allah will wed me in paradise to Mary, daughter of Imran.”

Few Christians know about this claim, but medieval Christians living under Islamic occupation were familiar with it because their Muslim conquerors regularly humiliated them with this text to refute the Church’s claim of Mary’s “perpetual virginity,” writes Ibrahim.

In fact, Egypt’s former Deputy Minister of Religious Endowments, Dr. Salem Abdul Galil, openly declared that among other biblical women like Moses’ sister and Pharaoh’s wife, “our prophet Muhammad — prayers and peace be upon him — will be married to (the Virgin) Mary in paradise.”

Ibrahim obtained the Arabic video of Galil stating this on the Mahwar television network.

“Far from creating ‘commonalities,’ it should be clear that such appropriation creates conflict,” Ibrahim stressed.

Francis Urges Confessors to ‘Forgive Everyone’

Addressing priests in Verona, Francis urged confessors to offer unconditional forgiveness to penitents coming for confession.

“Please, may it not be a torture session. Please, forgive everything. Everything. And forgive without causing suffering, forgive opening your heart to hope. I ask this of you priests, The Church needs forgiveness, and you are the tools to forgive. Everyone,” he insisted.

“Have you understood? Forgive everyone,” Francis repeated.

Statistics from Italy’s Department of Penitentiary Administration reveal that a very high percentage of inmates in Italian prisons are Muslims who hail from Morocco (20.3%), Romania (11.6%), Albania (10.5%) and Tunisia (10.1%).

The prison in Verona has 580 inmates, of which 42 are women, and 313 are foreigners (54.0%), who are mostly Muslim.

Italy’s Ministry of Justice has expressed concern regarding the growing phenomenon of Islamic radicalization of inmates in Italian prisons, including forceful Muslim proselytism and training for terrorism.

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